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Inmates learn to be better fathers

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PENDLETON, Ind. -- Prison inmates who have completed a parenting program say it has helped them better connect with their children while behind bars.

The first class of 19 Correctional Industrial Facility inmates graduated Wednesday from the Inside/Out Dad program after meeting two hours once a week for 12 weeks.

"Our children is all we have sometimes," said John T. Young, an inmate from Grant County who has a 6-year-old daughter. "We lose our wives; our parents die. The main focus for many of us is our children."

The program, developed by Gaithersburg, Md.-based National Fatherhood Initiative, is aimed at helping the inmates improve their parenting skills and have better relationships with their children.

"Involvement with your children for today and forever is what it's all about," prison Superintendent Tom Hanlon told the inmates. "There is so little that is taught to us about raising children."

State Department of Correction Commissioner J. David Donahue said the program is being offered at every prison housing men. About 140 inmates at the Correctional Industrial Facility have signed up for the next series of classes.

Inmate Thomas Murry, who has three children and three stepchildren, said the program encompassed more than just parenting tips.

"This not only taught me how to value my kids, but build a foundation of social skills," he said. "We all learn from somebody. We all want better things in life."